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VOICES


By Catherine Woteki

THE SCIENCE BEHIND YOUR FOOD

When people think about where their food comes from, many think of the farmer or rancher—and rightly so. But few think of the scientists working behind the scenes to support our agricultural producers, keeping them productive and our food supply safe.

Food, agriculture and natural resource scientists are involved in the biggest challenges facing the world today: ensuring food safety and security, keeping food producers productive amidst a dramatically changing climate, creating the bio-energy sources of the future and improving food quality and availability to encourage healthier diets. Some of the best and brightest minds in America are in labs across the country, rolling up their sleeves to solve these diverse problems.

In fact, agricultural scientists in our land grant universities and USDA labs have a history of finding the answers most urgently needed by society. We have to make sure this dynamic engine for innovation and problem-solving keeps going. That means making sure we continue to attract the best and brightest students to the agriculture, food and natural resource sciences. As Dean of ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, I saw firsthand the excitement and fulfillment students can gain studying science—and as they progressed through their careers. Now, as USDA's chief scientist, I have the privilege of overseeing the scientific agencies where many of those students will continue their research—and that enthusiasm endures.

In short, I'm happy to keep the flame burning for agricultural, food and natural resource research. It's an exciting field of science, and one that will continue to offer good jobs well into the future. ISU is a key player in this effort, and I look forward to working together to ensure that agriculture continues to fulfill its vital role. 

Catherine Woteki, is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics. Woteki served as dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University from 2002 to 2005.